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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [GB](#)  
SUBJECT: GABON CONFIRMS WILLINGNESS TO HOST AFRICOM ELEMENT

REF: A. LIBREVILLE 0413  
[1](#)B. STATE 140052

Classified By: CDA Nathan Holt for reasons 1.4 (a), (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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[1](#)2. (S/NF) Gabon continues to welcome the idea of hosting an AFRICOM element, Foreign Minister Jean Ping told CDA October [1](#)9. Gabon sees AFRICOM's mission as consistent with Gabon's national interest and Gabon is willing to help persuade others in the region to be more accommodating. Ping advised us to consult further with influential Minister of Defence Ali Bongo, "although I already know what he will say." Bongo has previously confirmed his support for hosting an AFRICOM element in Gabon. Ping confirmed that the DOD/State technical team described Reftel is welcome in Gabon as soon as arrangements are in place for their visit. End Summary.

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Gabon Still Ready  
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[1](#)3. (S/NF) Gabon remains willing to host an AFRICOM element, Foreign Minister Jean Ping told CDA and DATT October 9. The concept is not new, Ping said, and Gabon has repeatedly confirmed its position in dialogue with senior U.S. diplomatic and military personnel (Ref. A). The joint DOD/State technical survey team (Ref. B) is likewise welcome, Ping confirmed.

[1](#)4. (S/NF) Minister of Defence Ali Bongo should be consulted in advance of the technical team visit, Ping said, "although I already know what he will say." Ali Bongo, the son of Gabonese President El Hadj Omar Bongo Ondimba, confirmed three weeks ago that Gabon is still willing to host an AFRICOM element. CDA has requested another meeting with the defence minister to reconfirm this understanding and pave the way for the expected visit of the technical survey team.

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Interests Coincide  
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[1](#)5. (S/NF) Ping stressed that Gabon had long been an advocate of security cooperation among the states of Central Africa and the Gulf of Guinea. The Gulf of Guinea Commission was Gabon's idea, Ping claimed, and Gabon continues to play an important role in regional security initiatives. He cited President Bongo's efforts at the China-Africa summit in November 2006 on behalf of peace in Darfur, Gabon's pressure on former Chadian leader Goukouni Oueddei to reconcile with N'djamena, and its continuing leadership in FOMUC, the EU-backed peacekeeping force in Central African Republic.

[1](#)6. (S/NF) Gabon supports the fight against terrorism, Ping continued, and reached its decision about AFRICOM independently. Others in the region are not so favorably disposed toward the U.S. initiative, he admitted. Angola, "with one foot in SADCC and one in CEEAC" is particularly

problematic, Ping said. He added that Gabon would be willing to help the U.S. persuade Angola to adopt a more positive attitude. Ping said he was dismayed by AU Chairman Alpha Oumar Konare's recent statements rebuffing AFRICOM. Konare did not speak for Africa, Ping claimed, only "for himself."

¶7. (S/NF) CDA and DATT emphasized that no decisions had been reached about the location of potential AFRICOM sites. CDA asked Ping for a honest assessment of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS, or CEEAC in its French acronym). CEEAC is among the weakest of Africa's regional groupings, Pin said. Most of its member states have been at soe point in the last two decades, and some member sates remain unstable. To be an effective interntional organization, Ping said, CEEAC needs insttutional strengthening and better personnel. Neertheless, Ping asserted, CEEAC is slowly improving as a regional security mechanism.

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Comment  
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¶8. (S/NF) Gabon's senior political leadership is clearly ready to host an AFRICOM element. Any establishment of an AFRICOM presence here, however, should be part of a concerted diplomatic and public relations effort that includes the central African region, not just Gabon. End Comment.

HOLT